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“Gamification” a New Way for Companies to get their Game On

If you haven't heard of “gamification” before you're probably not alone. Gamification is a newly coined term used to define an emerging trend that expands gaming technology into non-gaming sectors. Businesses are starting to “gamify” their websites. It involves enticing prospects to stick around a website longer and engage with a company through a game layer that makes the experience more fun. At a recent Northwest Entrepreneur meeting, Scott Dodson, a long time gamer, serial entrepreneur, and currently COO of Bobber Interactive, a gaming technology company focused on the financial sector, enlightened entrepreneurs about how they can take advantage of this emerging phenomenon.

Why gaming matters

Gamification creates a power motivator for engagement and re-engagement because players come back to play over and over again. As Gabe Zichermann, author of *Game Based Marketing* stated, “When given a choice between two similar activities, consumers will always choose the one that's more enjoyable.”

Done well, a game layer makes interacting fun, and can invigorate a users' experience with a company. Simple psychology explains why: people play games because they make you feel good. Games drive human behavior. They help people solve problems, albeit in a fun, engaging way. The gaming experience can make your visitors feel competent by overcoming game challenges. Games also deliver a level of autonomy or control over an environment. When it comes to integrating a game layer into a company's website, the level of relatedness between a visitor and the

company is enhanced when the game is tied to the business.

Tim Chang of Norwest Venture Partners stated, “Gaming 3.0 is about leveraging game mechanics to re-invigorate other markets: points, achievements, and leveling up are game constructs that can be utilized in industries that no longer monetize as effectively via macro-transactions or advertising.”

Scott Dodson translates the impact even more simply, “To heck with cajoling, convincing and motivating. Gaming creates a context where it is in a persons best interest to do what you want them to do because what works for them (via the game), also works for you.”

How gamification works

Games have been around since prehistoric times. They've evolved from one-to-one and group games, to electronic, TV and online formats. A game is really any activity involving skill, chance or endurance that is played according to a set of rules. Social media games like Farmville, Bejeweled and Mafia Wars have taken online, social gaming to a new level, and businesses are catching on. Although companies have integrated games into their marketing for years, their approaches are evolving.

Green stamp reward games were popular in the 1930's. Boys and Girls Scouts still use merit badges as a game to reward achievement. More recently McDonald's marketed the popular monopoly game to

engage customers by playing for the chance of free food. Airlines introduced mileage programs as a game to reward loyalty with special perks and free flights. Priceline built their business model on the game of chance, with consumers playing for prices they wanted to pay for travel. Nike and others have gotten into gaming with online fitness challenges, and even financial services companies are providing game layers to encourage saving and financial planning.

The key elements to consider when devising a game layer for your business are to make sure that it relates to your offering and builds in these fundamental gaming characteristics:

- Base it on a real world Meta game like slots, board games or cards and include metrics such as scoring, points or other currency.
- Include a reward and feedback layer that encourages persistence through levels, or provide reward features like titles, badges, reputation or leadership.
- Reward continued progression by granting access through a hard to achieve “velvet rope”, to enforce and reward scarcity or earned progression achievement.

The objective of a gaming layer is to make a website fun and sticky. The gaming venue should be relatable to the business and provide a platform for visitors to demonstrate their competence and autonomy. When these elements come together the marketing payoff is that it's easier to entice visitors to return, engage and to make more purchases. In the best of all worlds your new game will even go viral—wouldn't that be fun!

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